

(Free pdf) Hitler's First Victims: The Quest for Justice

Hitler's First Victims: The Quest for Justice

Timothy W. Ryback

DOC | *audiobook | ebooks | Download PDF | ePub



[Download](#)

[Read Online](#)

#1841392 in Books 2015-10-13 2015-10-13 Original language: English PDF # 1 7.99 x .62 x 5.161, .0 #File Name: 0804172005304 pages | File size: 71.Mb

Timothy W. Ryback : Hitler's First Victims: The Quest for Justice before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hitler's First Victims: The Quest for Justice:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. That "journey of a thousand miles" began with single steps into evil -- the first murders of Jews and Bolsheviks. Dachau 1933. By George N. Schmidt When many of us were young, we were heartened by the statement "A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step..." And of course being young and American, we saw that step in a positive direction. But what if those first steps were a journey into

unspeakable evil that will never be forgotten as long as our histories are written for the most part by decent and civilized women and men? As we learn from "Hitler's First Victims: The Quest for Justice" (by Timothy W. Ryback), an evil journey has to also begin with a few steps. The "Final Solution to the Jewish Problem" and the Holocaust didn't begin with the German invasion of Poland (and later, the Soviet Union) or at the Wannsee conference, but much earlier. And we finally have a book to explain how those first few murders, at Dachau in 1933, slowly began the process by means of which Heinrich Himmler and the SS trained and vetted the cadre of men (and a few women) who would go on to murder six million European Jews and millions of other "Untermenschen" between the beginning of Nazi power in Germany in 1933 and the final defeat of the Nazi military machine by the combined allied forces in 1945. "Hitler's First Victims" tells a tiny story of a few men from the old Germany who tried to continue a tradition of justice as the Nazis began inventing the horrors of the concentration camps outside the small Bavarian city of Dachau in 1933. It is mainly the story of a German lawyer, Josef Hartinger, a prosecutor in Bavaria who insisted on leading the investigation into the first murders by the SS at the newly created concentration camp outside Dachau during the first half of 1933. Although Hartinger was not successful in prosecuting the SS men who had committed murders within the first six months after the opening of the camp, his meticulous (some would proudly say, without irony, "Germanic") documentation came alive, so to speak, later when the Nuremberg Trials brought many of the surviving top Nazis to a form of Western justice in the late 1940s and early 1950s (the Russians on the other side of the Cold War line were much less meticulous in their dealings with the Nazis they caught by the war's end, just as they were less civilized in their treatment of Germans as their armies moved towards Berlin from late 1944 through May 1945, but that's another story worth studying at another time and place...). Joseph Hartinger learned that four Jewish detainees (most of them "communists" or socialists) had been "shot while trying to escape..." during the opening months of Dachau the concentration camp. (One of the ironies that Ryback makes clear is that prior to the days of Nazism, Dachau was known as a center for the arts!). Hartinger was a German nationalist, but not a Nazi, and he was well schooled in the law, which said that prisoners were not to be tortured or murdered in German prisons. And so, with the help of assistants, he documented the murders of the first four victims of the SS, and then went on to document more murders (and tortures) at Dachau until blocked as Nazi laws took hold in late 1933. Amazingly, Hartinger's records survived the war, and his materials proved useful to prove, at Nuremberg, that from the beginning Nazism was a criminal enterprise that murdered its domestic enemies long before its armies conquered lands east and west and its agents got a free hand to murder on a massive scale from Poland and France to Russia and the Scandinavian countries. It's worth noting the names of those first four murder victims: Rudolf Benario, Ernst Goldmann, Arthur Kahn, and Erwin Kahn. First taken into "protective custody" by the new Nazi government of Bavaria and put under SS control at the newly opened Dachau concentration camp, the four were dead within a few weeks after being taken from their families. Over the subsequent months, the Nazi guards at Dachau tortured (through beatings from the feet to the shoulders) their victims, then killed them in various ways, usually claiming that the victims had "committed suicide" or were shot "trying to escape." Josef Hartinger not only documented the fact that these men had been murdered, but even provided photographs of the back of one of the victims (Sebastian Nefzger), showing the scarring that resulted from the vicious beatings he had suffered before he allegedly "killed himself." The photo of Nefzger's corpse (one of many astonishing photographs in this book) reminded me of those photographs of the scarrings of slaves from the slave eras in the United States. But unlike American slaves, the Nazis' victims were not useful and productive "property" at the time they were tortured, so their murders were the beginning of a long road to the depths of evil not contemplated prior to what Nazism became and did. One of the appalling facts that comes out clearly in Ryback's book is that more detailed attention by reporters to what the Nazis were doing might have slowed them down early. But over and over there was a "Munich" style version of reality competing with the facts for public attention in the nations that all wanted to avoid a repeat of what then was called "The Great War." And Ryback also notes how much value Hitler placed on good public relations from the first days of his power, forcing the government to allocate special funds for positive PR in nations like England and the United States from the middle 1930s on. Sadly, as we know, it worked in many cases. In league with many of the anti-Semites and racists who formed the majority of white Americans during those years, the apologists for Nazism, from Henry Ford to Charles Lindbergh, managed to keep the drums beating for "Common Sense Neutrality" despite the invasions and conquests of Poland, then France, by the German armies. It was only with one of Hitler's more arrogant mistakes -- his declaration of war on the United States following Pearl Harbor in December 1941 -- that the majority of U.S. elected officials were able to unite behind the President and the war against fascism in Europe and Japanese imperialism in the Pacific beginning in late 1941 and escalating through 1945, when the sheer industrial might of the United States helped pulverize Hitler's Reich and divide Germany after forcing its unconditional surrender. But when the war ended, the question remained how did all that happen? Not just aggressive war (which was one of the Nuremberg charges) but how did the enslavement of millions of people from the "East" and the liquidation of six million Jews (gypsies, and special needs people) in the vast number of concentration camps happen? And so, that journey began when the murderers and torturers at Dachau and their Bavarian leader (Heinrich Himmler) got away with it despite the work of Josef Hartinger and his staff in 1933. And it was not as if the "world" was not informed about what was going on at Dachau long before the Germany armies conquered Poland and

created the death camps the most famous of which is Auschwitz. The crematoriums at Auschwitz were first put into operation almost a decade after Himmler's SS buddies in Bavaria began murdering in 1933. And the story was told early, too. One of those tortured by the Dachau guards, a communist named Hans Beimler, escaped and published a book with the German title "im Morderlager Dachau" in 1933! But because Beimler was a commie and a Jew, it became easy for the anti-communists and anti-Semites of the democracies to continue to ignore the facts. The ignoring of the "Final Solution" began long before the term "Final Solution" was invented. This book documents its sources well, and recognizes that today one of the most important sources of information consists of photographs and documents. And so the book not only provides the critical reader with a 22-page Appendix (the complete indictment prepared by Hartinger) but 35 pages of footnotes -- and 16 pages of amazing photographs of people, places and documents. The final photograph of the gate of Dachau with the infamous slogan "Arbeit Macht Frei" (work makes you free) should to this day send chills to anyone who is trying to understand the complex roots of the histories that gave rise to our present world -- and the ideologies we still face in it.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.
Terrific but emotional read, highly recommended
By M. PoolWell researched, riveting book that captures the rapid pace that Germany's legal institutions were undermined and perverted after Hitler rose to power in January 1933 through the detailed examination of the first deaths at the Dachau concentration camp. Hartinger's determination for justice is inspiring, but the depravity and violence of the SS guards are disgusting and the Nazis' cynical corruption and manipulation Germany's institutions are shocking. I learned much about the history of Germany in the immediate post-WWI period that I was unaware of.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.
Great book with some very personal stories that showed their faces in this book and led to the Holocaust as we know it. Had we only seen this in the free world when it started, millions of lives could have been saved from needless deaths.

The remarkable story of Josef Hartinger, the German prosecutor who risked everything to bring to justice the first killers of the Holocaust and whose efforts would play a key role in the Nuremberg tribunal. At 9 am on April 13, 1933, deputy prosecutor Josef Hartinger received a telephone call summoning him to the newly established concentration camp of Dachau. Four prisoners had been shot. The SS guards claimed that the men had been trying to escape. But what Hartinger found when he arrived convinced him that something was terribly wrong. All four victims were Jews. Before Germany was engulfed by Nazi dictatorship, it was a constitutional republic. And just before Dachau became a site of Nazi genocide, it was a legal state detention center for political prisoners. In 1933, that began to change. In *Hitler's First Victims*, Timothy W. Ryback evokes a society on the brinkone in which civil liberties are sacrificed to national security, in which citizens increasingly turn a blind eye to injustice, in which the bedrock of judicial accountability chillingly dissolves into the martial caprice of the Third Reich. This is an astonishing portrait of Hitler's first moments in power, and the true story of one man's race to expose the Nazis as murderers on the eve of the Holocaust.

Chilling. . . . Harrowing. . . . fascinating. The Wall Street Journal Unflinching and utterly compelling. . . . Ryback's prose is well paced and highly readable, his conclusion unerring. . . . the story of the first killings at Dachau has scarcely been more urgent. The Herald Scotland Gripping. . . . In sparing us no detail of the nauseating brutality of the SS guards [Ryback] reminds us yet again of the depths of bestiality to which these men descended. . . . Anyone who thinks that Nazism came to power legally and without violence needs to read this account. The Guardian (London) Has all the makings of a legal thriller. The Boston Globe Ryback's account is gripping and thoroughly chilling as it provides a snapshot of a moment when the Nazis still required a veil of legality. . . . diligently researched works such as this are as necessary now as they were decades ago, to keep both memory and vigilance alive. The Telegraph (London) Fascinating, disturbing. . . . Ryback's book is a decades-overdue recognition. Jewish Times Valuable. . . . Turns the spotlight on the rapid erosion of state power in the early months of Nazi rule. . . . Ryback's vivid narrative of an ordinary German lawyer's experience makes this feel much more immediate, bringing home the terrible realities of early Nazification. The Times Higher Education (London) Examines an early but enormously significant episode in the evolution of the Nazi program of genocide. . . . An important addition to Holocaust collections. Booklist A chilling, lawyerly study with laserlike focus. Kirkus In recounting the compelling story of a prosecutor who sought to bring to justice the perpetrators of crimes at Dachau in the early days of the Nazis' reign, Timothy Ryback's book is all the more startling and important for bringing to life an episode so little known. It suggests what might have been if more Germans at the time had done their professional duty with equal moral compass. Raymond Bonner, author of *Anatomy of Injustice* This is an extraordinary, gripping, and edifying story told extraordinarily well by Timothy Ryback. I read it with a sense of amazement at the capacity of one good man to stand tall in the face of evil, and at the capacity of others to fall into unspeakable barbarism. Richard Bernstein, author of *China 1945* In this finely researched and deeply disturbing account of how Jews and Communists murdered in Dachau in 1933 became Hitler's first victims, Timothy W. Ryback finds a rare point of light in the courage of an obscure Bavarian prosecutor who tried to fight the escalating Nazi savagery with the rule of law. Thanks to his documented record of the atrocities taking place at Dachau, Ryback

can now demonstrate how, within weeks of coming to power, the Nazis had already set off along the dark path that would lead to genocide. Alan Riding, author of *And the Show Went On: Cultural Life in Nazi-Occupied Paris*. Timothy Ryback's *Hitlers First Victims* is a significant addition to the Holocaust canon. The story of the first four Jews murdered at Dachau, as well as the astonishing account of the German prosecutor (surely a precursor of Claus von Stauffenberg) who, in 1933, attempted to charge the vicious Nazi concentration camp commandant with murder, form the heart and soul of Ryback's amazing book. The author's research is prodigious and his accumulation of new details make the reader feel as if he is observing the first spreading of the Nazi plague through a microscope. This is history come alive in your hands. Robert Littell, author of *The Amateur* In this horrifying and heartbreaking account of Dachau's early days, Timothy Ryback restores, to the murderers and the murdered alike, something crucially, necessarily missing from most Holocaust histories: their individuality. Then, by capturing, meticulously and understatedly, the retail barbarity of the place, he helps anticipate the wholesale annihilation to follow. And by recounting the striking heroism of two men: a local prosecutor and a medical examiner, simply trying to do their jobs, he allows us at least to ponder whether, had more such good Germans come forward, it all might just have been stopped. David Margolick, author of *Beyond Glory: Joe Louis vs. Max Schmeling, and a World on the Brink* Timothy W. Ryback's gripping account of one man's fight against Nazi atrocities holds important lessons for us. Experience demonstrates that the authors of genocide and crimes against humanity frequently test the waters before fully implementing their murderous plans. The Holocaust was no exception. Ryback shows how this genocidal act may have been averted had more people acted with vigilance and determination. Our challenge today is to act on Ryback's historical insights before new rounds of mass atrocities unfold. Kenneth Roth, executive director, Human Rights Watch

About the Author Timothy W. Ryback is the author of *Hitler's Private Library*, which was named to the *Washington Post* Book World Best Nonfiction list in 2008, and *The Last Survivor: Legacies of Dachau*, a *New York Times* Notable Book. He has written for *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New Yorker*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The New York Times*. He lives and works in Paris.

Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

1 Crimes of the Spring Thursday morning of Easter Week 1933, April 13, saw clearing skies that held much promise for the upcoming holiday weekend. Mild temperatures were foreseen for Bavaria as they were throughout southern Germany, with a few rain showers predicted for Friday, but brilliant, sunny skies for the Easter weekend. Previous generations hailed such days as *Kaiserwetter*, weather fit for a kaiser, a playful gibe at the former monarch's father, who appeared en plein air only when sufficient sunlight permitted his presence to be recorded by photographers. In the spring of 1933, some now spoke in higher-spirited and more reverential tones of *Fhrerwetter*. It was Adolf Hitler's first spring as chancellor. Shortly after nine o'clock that morning, Josef Hartinger was in his second-floor office at Prielmayrstrasse 5, just off Karlsplatz in central Munich, when he received a call informing him that four men had been shot in a failed escape attempt from a recently erected detention facility for political prisoners in the moorlands near the town of Dachau. As deputy prosecutor for one of Bavaria's largest jurisdictions Munich II Hartinger was responsible for investigating potential crimes in a sprawling sweep of countryside outside Munich's urban periphery. My responsibilities included, along with the district courts in Garmisch and Dachau, all juvenile and major financial criminal matters for the entire jurisdiction, as well as all the so-called political crimes. Thus, for the Dachau camp, I had dual responsibilities, he later wrote. Deputy Prosecutor Hartinger was a model Bavarian civil servant. He was conservative in his faith and politics, a devout Roman Catholic and a registered member of the Bavarian People's Party, the centrist people's party of the Free State of Bavaria, founded by Dr. Heinrich Held, a fellow jurist and a fierce advocate of Bavarian autonomy. In April 1933, Hartinger was thirty-nine years old and belonged to the first generation of state prosecutors trained in the processes and values of a democratic republic. He pursued communists and National Socialists with equal vigor, and since Hitler's appointment as chancellor had watched the ensuing chaos and abuses with the confidence that such a government could not long endure. The Reich president, Paul von Hindenburg, had dismissed four chancellors in the past ten months: Heinrich Brüning in May, Franz von Papen in November, and Kurt von Schleicher just that past January. There was nothing preventing Hindenburg from doing the same with his latest chancellor Adolf Hitler. Until then, Hartinger's daily commerce in crime involved burned barns, a petty larceny, an occasional assault, and, based on the remnant entries in the departmental case register, all too frequent incidents of adult transgressions against minors. Forty-one-year-old Max Lackner, for example, was institutionalized for two years for sexual abuse of children under fourteen. Ilya Malic, a salesman from Yugoslavia, was arrested after he forced a fourteen-year-old to French-kiss. Hartinger spoke discreetly of juvenile matters. Homicides were rare. The only registered murder for those years was a crime of passion committed by forty-seven-year-old Alfons Graf, who put four bullets into the head of his companion, Frau Reiting, when he discovered her in the back of his company car with another man. But that year, following Hitler's January appointment as chancellor and the dramatic arson attack a month later that saw the stately Berlin Reichstag consumed in a nightmare conflagration of crashing glass, twisted steel, and surging flames, the jurisdiction was swept by an unprecedented wave of arrests in the name of national security. In Untergrnberg, the farmer Franz Sales Mendler was arrested for making disparaging remarks about the new government. Maria Strohle, the wife of a power plant owner in Hergensweiler, told a neighbor that she heard Hitler had paid 50,000 reichsmarks to stage the arson attack on the Reichstag; she was sentenced to three months in prison, as was Franz Schliersmaier in Bsenreutin,

who put the amount at 500,000. One Bavarian was indicted for comparing Hitler to Stalin, and another for calling him a homosexual, and still another for suggesting he did not look German. Hitler is a foreigner who smuggled himself into the country, Julie Kolmeder said at a Munich beer garden a few streets from Hartingers office. Just look at his face. A Munich coachman crossed the law with the indelicate aside, Hitler kann mich im Arsch lecken.

Euphemistically: Hitler can kiss my ass. More than one person was prosecuted for calling a Nazi a Bazi.¹ Thousands of others were taken into Schutzhaft, or protective custody, for no apparent reason at all. The shooting of four men in a failed escape from the Dachau Concentration Camp must have struck Hartingers Roman Catholic sensibilities as particularly unfortunate, coming as it did just two days before Good Friday and amid an appeal by the archbishop of Munich and Freising for an Easter amnesty. In the name of, and on behalf of, the Bavarian bishops, I have the honor, Your Excellency, to extend the following request, the stately and imperious Cardinal Faulhaber had written Bavarias Reich governor on April 3, that the investigation procedure for those in protective custody be expedited as quickly as possible in order to relieve the detainees and their families from emotional torment. Faulhaber expressed the desire that the detainees could be home in time for the Easter weekend, reminding the governor that there was no occasion more sacred to Christians than the Eastertide. If because of time constraints the investigations cannot be completed by Good Fri day, Faulhaber proposed, then perhaps out of pure Christian and humanitarian grounds, an Easter amnesty can be granted from Good Friday until the end of Easter. The cardinal reminded the governor that in December 1914 Pope Benedict XV had invoked a Christmas armistice that stilled weapons on both sides of the front. What worked in a time of war must certainly work in peacetime, was the suggestion. Indeed, the previous month Chancellor Hitler himself had stated that his greatest ambition was to bring back to the nation the millions who had been misled, rather than to destroy them. What better way to instill a sense of national loyalty than through a gesture of Christian clemency on the holiday celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ? In this deeply Catholic corner of the country, when the archbishop of Munich and Freising, the oldest and most powerful of the states bishoprics, spoke, the vast majority of Bavarias four million Catholics listened, and on this occasion so did its political leadership. A week later, the state interior minister, Gauleiter Adolf Wagner, responded on the Reich governors behalf.² Most Honorable Herr Cardinal, I have the honor of responding to your letter to the governor of April 3, 1933, he wrote, to inform Your Eminence that we are in the process of reviewing the cases of everyone currently in detention, and that by Easter more than a thousand individuals will be released from protective custody. Wagner conveyed additional good news. The state government would permit Easter Mass to be celebrated among those practicing Roman Catholics who remained in detention as long as it did not constitute a burden to the state budget. Wagner recommended that the responsible religious authorities should be directly in contact with the administration of the individual detention camps, whom I will provide corresponding instructions as to how to deal with this matter. But now, amid heartening news of the Easter amnesty, came news of the deaths at Dachau. The call to Hartinger that Thursday morning was conducted in conformity with Paragraph 159 of the Strafprozessordnung, or Criminal Procedure Code, which required police officers to report immediately to the prosecutor or local magistrate any case in which a person has died from causes other than natural ones. Paragraph 160, in turn, obligated Hartinger to take immediate action: As soon as the prosecutor is informed of a suspected criminal act, either through a report or by other means, he is to investigate the matter until he has determined whether an indictment is to be issued. In compliance with his Paragraph 160 responsibilities, Hartinger called Dr. Moritz Flamm, the Munich II medical examiner, who was responsible for conducting postmor tem examinations and autopsies in criminal investigations. Hartinger liked Dr. Flamm. Both men had previously worked in Munich I, Hartinger as an assistant prosecutor and Flamm as a parttime assistant medical examiner. Like Hartinger, he was a man of keen intelligence who had earned perfect grades in school. And like Hartinger, Flamm was a man of sterling professionalism. Flamm autopsies were models of precision and efficiency not a moment wasted, not a detail overlooked. Often thirty pages in length, they could withstand the most rigorous scrutiny in a court of law. Flamm was particularly proficient in bullet wounds. He had completed his medical training at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich in July 1914, just in time to join the 2nd Bavarian Infantry Regiment. He was dispatched to the front in August 1916 with the 3rd Medical Company, where he served meritoriously, earning an Iron Cross, the Bavarian Military Order, and the Friedrich August Cross. Particularly noteworthy is his absolute reliability and his medical professionalism that make him, without question, suited for any type of service, the company surgeon had commented after the war. At the front [Flamm] became virtually indispensable as the situation with medical sup- plies deteriorated, he wrote, all the while demonstrating a seemingly inexhaustible dedication to his work. The surgeon observed that Flamm was notably modest and by nature rather sensitive, but possessed of intelligence, sound judgment, and humor even in the most desperate situations. The surgeon said he had come to know in Flamm a physician for whom one can only wish full and well-deserved recognition and in good conscience can provide unqualified praise. Flamms handwriting, precise and refined, with playful, elegant flourishes, reflects his calm and easy competence. Flamm also demonstrated a fierce independence and willing- ness to act on his conscience when circumstances demanded. In the spring of 1919, amid a failed Bolshevik coup that saw thousands taken into protective custodywith and without causehe exercised his authority as chief physician of a military hospital to order the release of two patients who were being detained on suspicion of collaborating with communists. Flamm was accused of

Bolshevik sympathies, but was taken into personal protection by his superior, who vouched for him administratively, professionally, and politically and insisted that he was a man free of any personal, moral, or political blemish. After two years with Flamm in Munich II, Hartinger had come to share the same high regard. In addition, Flamm had a drivers license and his own motorcar. 1. The word Bazi can be translated as swindler or scoundrel, and derives from the Bavarian dialect, as does the word Nazi, a shortening of the word Nationalsozialist, but also an old nickname for Ignatius, a popular Bavarian name commonly associated with a country bumpkin, and applied disparagingly to Hitler followers. A Nazi never called another Nazi a Nazi. They referred to each other as National Socialists or party comrades. 2. The Gauleiter, or district leader, was the Nazi Party official responsible for local affairs. These Nazi Party districts corresponded to the thirtythree voting districts for the Reichstag elections. In 1941, the number of Gauleiter and corresponding districts was increased to fortythree.